

# Portugal

## Prince Henry the Navigator

The first explorations by Europeans trying to find a sea route to Asia were along the Atlantic, or west, coast of Africa. In the early 1400s, Prince Henry of Portugal, known as Henry the Navigator, sent ships south along the African coast looking for a way around the continent. During his lifetime, his captains explored the coastline as far as modern Sierra Leone, about halfway southward along the continent. Although the prince did not travel with his captains, his patronage of these voyages had an enormous impact on Europe's role in world exploration.

## Bartolomeu Dias

Bartolomeu Dias set off from Portugal in 1487 with three ships to find the southern tip of Africa and determine whether an all-water route to India was possible. Dias sailed further south than any previous Portuguese explorer, keeping sight of land to his east. A storm drove him out to sea. When Dias sailed back for the coast he noticed that he was sailing north instead of south and land was now to his west. That meant he had already passed the tip of Africa, and that it should be possible to sail around Africa to India. The crew was unwilling to sail farther, so Dias reversed his course, sailing for home. This time he spotted the Cape of

Good Hope at the juncture of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. Based on his experiences there, Dias called the cape “Cape of Storms,” but later the name was changed to “Cape of Good Hope” because the Portuguese rulers were afraid “Cape of Storms” would scare off additional explorers and traders. Dias later sailed with both da Gama and Cabral, but he was in a subordinate role.

## Vasco da Gama

Vasco da Gama was a Portuguese explorer who followed in the footsteps of Dias and became the first European to sail around the southern tip of Africa and all the way to India.

Da Gama sailed from Lisbon, Portugal in July 1497, with four ships. By November he and his men had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and by December they had sailed beyond the point where Dias had turned around. Da Gama hired a pilot on the East African coast at Malindi. This pilot guided the ship to Calicut in India. The expedition arrived in May 1498. Da Gama tried to trade in Calicut but failed to establish a trade relationship or a peace treaty with the local authorities. He and his men took several Hindus on board to bring back to Portugal so that the Portuguese could learn about their customs. Then they set off on the return trip. On March 20, 1499, they rounded the Cape and returned to Portugal in September 1499. In Portugal he was given a hero's welcome and named “Admiral of the Indian Sea.”

Three years later, da Gama led 20 ships on a second voyage to Calicut, India, where he established the base of the Portuguese empire in Africa and Asia. He also explored the coast of East Africa. 38

## The Portuguese and the East African Swahili City-States

During his explorations, Da Gama stopped several times along the eastern coast of Africa, known as the Swahili coast. This coastal area was inhabited by a mixture of African, Arab, and Muslim peoples, who communicated using the Swahili language. Swahili evolved from the African Bantu languages and borrowed Arabic and Persian words.

Beginning around the 600s, Muslim Arabs used the seasonal monsoon winds to travel between Arabia and East Africa. By the 800s, Muslim Arabs began settling in these East African cities and marrying native women. It was these Swahili cities like Malindi that da Gama visited at the end of the 15th century. By that time, Muslim religious beliefs, architectural styles, and other cultural influences were evident.

At first, these cities were layover sites for ships going to and from Portugal. Sailing north along the African coast, the ships would stop at one of these cities to take on food and to give sailors a rest before the long trip across the Indian Ocean. The cities served the same purpose for homeward-bound ships.

After a time, the Portuguese government decided to try to take over these city-states. Portugal would then be able to control the trade network that reached between the Indian Ocean and the interior of Africa. The African interior offered such trade goods as iron tools, rhinoceros horn, palm oil, gold from southeastern Africa, and slaves, and in turn it served as a market for such imported goods as Chinese porcelain, Burmese pottery, and Indian cloth.

At first, the Portuguese government instructed its sea captains to try negotiating with the rulers of the city-states. If they were unable to reach a settlement, then the ship captains could attack. First, the city of Kilwa (in what is today Tanzania) fell. Soon, the Portuguese had managed to bring the other major east coast trading cities under their control. Over time, as the Portuguese concentrated their trading efforts at Mozambique Island, in the south, closer to the gold they sought, the other cities declined greatly in wealth and importance.

## Pedro Cabral Claims Brazil

Pedro Alvares Cabral set out from Portugal for India in March 1500. His mission was to follow the route of da Gama and help consolidate Portuguese power along the route to India, while also introducing Christianity to the peoples he encountered. However, Cabral overshot his course and ended up sailing so far west that he sailed to the east coast of South America. Cabral believed he had landed on an island, which he called “Island of the True Cross.” He held a religious service and claimed the land for Portugal. It later became known as Brazil after its forests of dyewoods, also known as brazilwoods.

Cabral eventually reached India and signed a trading agreement between India and Portugal. However, his voyage was plagued with bad weather and bad luck, and only four of his original 13 ships returned to Lisbon in June 1501.